



Life changing resources for children and youth

October 29, 2014

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman and Commissioners:

iFoster is writing to respectfully urge you and your colleagues at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to secure a public benefit from the proposed Comcast acquisition of Time Warner Cable (TWC) and trade of service territory with Charter Communications in the form of the 5 Recommendations below to ensure acceptable performance on the Comcast affordable offer called Internet Essentials (CIE):

1. Include All Low-Income Households
2. Set Performance Goals
3. Capitalize an Independent Fund and Coordinate with States
4. Establish an Advisory Oversight Committee
5. Offer Stand-Alone Internet Service

There are a significant number of issues at stake for California with this corporate consolidation and there must be a public benefit for California consumers, given the magnitude of the market share controlled by Comcast if approved – for example, 87% of all California students on free-or-reduced lunch will reside in Comcast service areas. Although CIE has a laudatory price-point, there is ample evidence of all the problems that have plagued the subscription process, resulting in just 14% of the eligible population being signed up during the last 3 years.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families reports 402,378 children in foster care on September 30, 2013. These children are placed in non-biological homes, many of which struggle with the accessibility and affordability of broadband. Access to the Internet is critical for these children and youth to succeed in school and maintain community and cultural ties, and for the caregivers raising them to access needed resources. Our organization and other partners have voiced frequent complaints to Comcast on the CIE subscription sign up process. These programs do not accommodate the realities of caregivers raising non-biological children. For example, foster children are legally considered to be a unique household of one, independent from the household that is raising them. But many programs do not recognize this legal status and exclude foster children based on the status of the caregiver (ie. income level, credit history, access to public supports, etc.) or the status of the biological parent, which are irrelevant and frequently exclude the child from programs to which they are legally entitled.

Today, statewide broadband adoption at home in California is at 75%, leaving 25% of the population farther and farther behind. There must be an affordable broadband rate widely available to the nearly 10 million Californians who remain offline, especially those in the child welfare system. These children must have a better opportunity to learn and become productive members of society.

We note that the California PUC in its Comcast –TWC merger docket, Application No. (A.) 14-04-013, will be exploring the issue also, according to its Scoping Memo and Ruling of the Assigned Commissioner and Administrative Law Judge: “How would the Merger benefit California consumers? For example, will the merger benefit low income outreach and adoption of broadband services that are accessible, affordable, and equitable in a manner that is enforceable and will help close the digital divide? Will the merger help educate consumers on using computers and the internet when service is provided? Will the merged entity offer standalone internet access and make sure consumers are aware of this offer?”¹ We recommend the FCC accept data from the CPUC’s merger docket on this point.

Should the FCC decide to approve this merger transaction, CETF respectfully requests that the FCC take this opportunity to order Comcast to greatly improve its program, and to be accountable for delivering a functional, results-driven program with measurable goals showing a real public benefit to low-income persons in its service areas.

In short, the FCC should take a more active oversight role in ensuring that the benefits of this program are delivered to low-income families in a more meaningful way. Absent specific performance goals, it is our experience that Comcast has failed to put enough outreach staff, advertising and operational resources on the program to deliver adequate levels of performance.

Sincerely,



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¹ Scoping Memo and Ruling of Assigned Commissioner and Administrative Law Judge, in re Joint Application of Comcast Corp., Time Warner Cable Inc., Time Warner Cable Information Services (California), LLC and Bright House Networks Information Services (California), LLC for Expedited Approval for the Transfer of Control of Time Warner Cable Information Services (California), LLC (U6874C); and the Pro Forma Transfer of Control of Bright House Networks Information Services (California), LLC (U6955C), to Comcast Corp. Pursuant to California Public Utilities Code Section 854(a), in A. 14-04-013 (filed Apr. 11, 2014), at 13 (“CPUC Scoping Memo”).